

# Conference News

EUROPEAN POLICY FORUM

## MINIMUM STANDARDS AND BEYOND

European Policy Forum 2007: Equal: towards a dignified standard of living for asylum seekers in Europe • Malmö 22-24 May



Vivid argument during opening session:

## GETTING YOUR ACT TOGETHER



**Kent Andersson, Mayor of Malmö the host of the conference, called for more co-operation directly between cities of Europe.**

It was an impressive line-up of Commission officials from two directorates and a former Commissioner in the first plenary debate. Moreover the leader of the City Council of Malmö.

The Policy Forum was held at the right place and in the right time, at least by Swed-

ish standards. The city of Malmö – where about one third of the population has foreign background is the place where you have an intense the debate about integration and one of the largest concentrations of immigrants. The region, is also the stronghold of populist political racist and anti-immigration movements.

- In the 60:s we had about five per cent of immigrants in this city, mostly from Nordic countries and now 25 per cent of our population are people born abroad and we have 170 nationalities, said Kent Andersson Mayor of Malmö .

The European Commission made some clear statements on ambitious plans and visions – from both the European Social Fund and DG Justice, Freedom and Security. The more than 100 projects and EQUAL partnerships represented got the message. Their work has been important and the

Cont. on page 2

## COMMISSION PRESENTS EVALUATION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECEPTION DIRECTIVE

- Overall, the reception Directive has been transposed satisfactorily in the majority of member states, Muriel Guin, from DG Justice, Freedom and Security said presenting the findings of the monitoring exercise carried out by the Odysseus on behalf of the European Commission.

- Contrary to what was expected, only three member states have lowered their standards: Austria restricted access to the labour market, the UK imposed restrictions on financial support and Slovenia restricted access to pocket money and free legal advice.

However, there is still a long way to go before reception conditions in Europe are harmonised. One of the main problems identified by the monitoring report is the wide level of discretion that some provisions in the directive allow for.

- These discrepancies undermine the level playing field and the objective of creating common European standards, Guin said.

As an example she mentioned the article regarding access to the labour market for asylum seekers. The monitoring report have found that about half of the member states allow access to the labour market after 1

Cont. on page 2



**Muriel Guin from the European Commission.**

## ASYLUM SEEKERS CAN STILL BE TARGET GROUP FOR NEW ESF-PROGRAMME



**Peter Stub Jørgensen in discussion with facilitator Göran Rosenberg.**

- The experiences from the last seven years of EQUAL will not be abandoned or lost as the programme comes to a halt. What was possible within the EQUAL programme will also be possible under the new European Social Fund, Peter Stub Jørgensen from the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the European Commission assured participants in plenary on Wednesday.

During the years, EQUAL as a labour market initiative developing new methods to integrate asylum seekers, have established a hundred Development Partnerships spread across all member states, and allocated a total of 200 million euro.

Member states have a lot of work ahead of them, establishing National Programmes, Stub Jørgensen said. While reviewing the national plans, the European Commission will analyse how the experiences drawn from the EQUAL programme can be incorporated into the National Programmes. Asylum seekers can still be a target group, they are not excluded in the national development programmes. The difference is that it is now up to the individual member states to decide the scope for setting up project for asylum seekers.

### Asylum seekers in the European Commission Guidelines for the National Programmes

"New lessons have been learnt from the Community Initiative Equal, especially in respect of the combination of local, regional, national and European action. These lessons should be integrated into ESF support.

Particular attention should be paid to the participation of target groups... and the integration of migrants, including those seeking asylum"

(Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council.)

# Conference News

Cont. from page 1

## Getting your act together

new programmes will offer possibilities of funding.

The opening for transnational projects for example, directly between cities was good news for the host city.

- We often see that the funding stops at the national level, said Kent Andersson.

The Swedish Minister of Migration, Tobias Billström, cancelled late in the run-up to the conference. Leaving some open questionmarks as to where the Swedish position will be in the coming decisions in the EU.

The moderator of the session, was Göran Rosenberg, one of Sweden's leading journalists and political correspondents. A remark about the need for the policymakers to "get their act together", was commented by Director Peter Stub Jørgensen from ESF.

- We have got our act together, with over 100 development partnerships all over Europe, the ESF has taken its fair share – facilitating the integration of asylum seekers into the labour market.

Cont. from page 1

## Commission presents report...

year, about nine member states allow access after a shorter period of time and only one member state violates the article by restricting access to the labour market altogether. She chose not to mention which one.

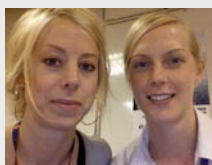
In a matter of days, Guin announced, the Council is expected to formally adopt a series of new financial measures that during 2008-2013 will support member states with, amongst other things, the reception of asylum seekers. Besides the European Refugee Fund III, there will also be an Integration Fund, a Return Fund and an External Borders Fund. The new ERF III will have an enhanced capacity to support member states in case of sudden influxes of immigrants and will also include a specific strand to support transnational partnerships through Community actions. The total amount available for the ERF III 2007-2013 is about 700 million euro.

The Odysseus monitoring report of member states' compliance with the directive is to be released in the near future.

### Editorial staff:

Emma Cars  
emma.cars@temaasyl.se

Lisa Tonnes  
lisa.tonnes@temaasyl.se



Anita Gradin, the first European Commissioner for asylum policy:

## "A TASK WHICH LIES AT THE HEART OF THE SOCIAL DIMENSION"

"In 1995 Sweden became a member of the European Union. That same year I was appointed EU Commissioner for Immigration, Justice and Home Affairs. I arrived in Brussels to a practically empty portfolio."



Anita Gradin was Sweden's first commissioner and at that time the decisions on asylum policies were a matter of cooperation directly between the Member States.

At her speech in the opening session she looked back over

the course of more than ten years. She noted that much has changed and some to the better.

- I think it is important to remember: this conference and the achievements of the Equal programme and the asylum theme are a small but important part of this process.

Anita Gradin noted that important steps to a common policy framework were taken at the top-level meetings of Amsterdam, Tampere and The Hague.

- These years also witnessed changes in the landscape of asylum seekers and migrants. New groups of asylum seekers came to Europe and new categories of migrants sought their way here, even using the asylum system, said Gradin

She praised the display of 100 transnational projects – Development Partnerships under the Equal Initiative. A powerful manifestation of a successful European co-operation effort underpinning the process which can improve asylum seekers' social and vocational integration.

Anita Gradin referred to recent state-

ments by the Swedish minister of immigration Tobias Billström, calling for solidarity between EU's Member States in sharing the responsibility of offering protection to refugees. Sweden will take over the rotating EU presidency in the fall 2009 and is expected have an active role in the development of a common asylum system by 2010.

- Creating a dignified and unified system for reception of asylum seekers in Europe is just one of many challenges which the EU and its Member States face. The Equal Initiative has generated unique opportunities for Member States to contribute towards improving their reception systems, according to Gradin.

But the former Commissioner also said that asylum policy must not become a policy of repatriation, although there is a need to guarantee that asylum seekers and migrants, who are not granted residency, can return to their country of origin under as good circumstances as possible.

- The whole issue of so called mixed flows, and how these different categories of migrants are dealt with in systems and policies at national and EU level, has so far not been afforded its rightful place in either EU development programmes or in existing policy.

Gradin demanded that asylum seekers remain a specifically identified target group in the new programme period of the European Social Fund.

- Improving asylum seekers social and vocational integration is unequivocally a task which lies at the heart of the social dimension of European co-operation and thereby also a development area in the new European Social Fund programme, she concluded.





## THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN ASYLUM SYSTEM – COMMISSION LAUNCHES GREEN PAPER

- We have high expectations of engaging the whole of Europe in a debate about the future of the European Asylum System, said Jean Louis de Brouwer, from the European Commission's DG Justice, Freedom and Security at the closing plenary session on Thursday afternoon.

Mr. de Brouwer outlined the next steps planned by the Commission. The reception directive, the focus of attention for most part of the conference, is only one piece of legislation in the building of a Common European Asylum System, CEAS. On 6 June, the European Commission will launch a debate on the future steps by presenting a so called Green Paper.

The Green Paper will aim to spark a discussion among all relevant stakeholders who will also be invited to submit their opinions. The consultation process will culminate in a hearing in Brussels on 18 October and inform the preparation of



**Jean Louis de Brouwer from the European Commission's DG Justice, Freedom and Security**

a policy plan on asylum, to be presented in the beginning of 2008. Proposals for new legislation are due in the summer of 2008.

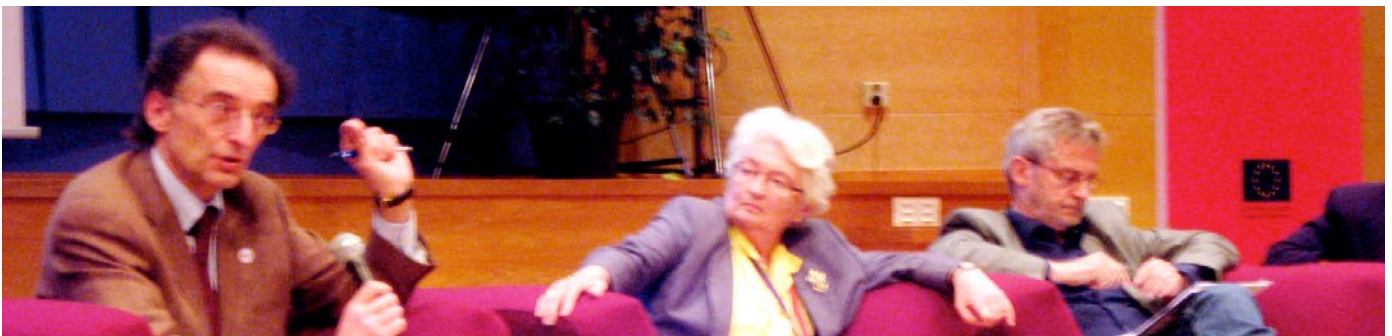
- Taking into account the lengthy deci-

sion-making procedures this leaves us with a very tight schedule, de Brouwer said. Deadline for the implementation of the next phase of the asylum system is 2010.

- Good news for the second phase decision-making is that there is a new player on the field – the European Parliament, which to a large extent was excluded from the first phase decision-making. National veto will no longer be possible. Bad news is however that we are still stuck with the same institutional framework, which means the second phase will still be about minimum standards.

The next steps of creating the CEAS will aim to establish a uniform status and a single procedure across the Union and to enhance practical cooperation between member states.

The Green Paper will be available from the Commission's website, visit [http://ec.europa.eu/justice\\_home/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/index_en.htm)



### PARTICIPANT IMAGES





## RECEPTION AT THE MALMÖ TOWN HALL



---

### THE CONFERENCE IN NUMBERS

**Participants: 258 (135 women and 123 men) Participating DP's: 49 Number of member states: 23**

---





## A GLIMPSE OF REALITY

Report from a study visit to Copenhagen

One of the study visits on Wednesday afternoon headed to the Danish Red Cross Culture House. Since 1994 the Culture House, situated in a lovely harbour area, has been the centre for a wide range of activities for asylum seekers and refugees in Denmark. As asylum seekers in Denmark are not allowed to work, other meaningful activities during the waiting period are of utmost importance.

The study visit began with a guided tour

of the house, giving us a glimpse of the various activities provided by the centre. This is where asylum seekers from different parts of the country come to attend Danish and English language courses, to play music and games, or just to meet friends over a cup of coffee or meal.

After getting acquainted with the building (and having a taste of delicious Eritrean coffee), we took part in a workshop on media training. The teachers and participants

of the media training gave us a presentation on the bi-monthly magazine *New Times*, a magazine that is distributed by the Culture House as a part of the *want2work* Equal development partnership (DP). The magazine has been produced since 1995 by asylum seekers who take part in the Media Training Course provided by the Culture House. The asylum seekers have different ways of contributing to the magazine, according to will and ability, from writing articles to providing photos and lay out and coming up with ideas for articles.

The *New Times*, which is free of charge and distributed to policy makers, politicians, cafés, libraries and NGO's, has become an important tool for the asylum seeking community to communicate with the Danish society. As a great example of exchanging "good practices" the concept has also spread to a DP in Scotland, where a similar magazine called *New Voices* is produced. In Belgium a similar concept is under development and if the hopes of the editor of *New Times* come true, we might even see a pan-European newsletter of this kind in the future, spreading the voices of asylum seekers all over Europe.

You can visit *New Times* on the Internet on [www.newtimes.dk](http://www.newtimes.dk).

### EU IGNORES INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES SAYS ECRE

Bjarte Vandvik, General Director of ECRE, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, said that rather than asking ourselves why we should invest in refugees, we should ask what the consequences are if we don't.

- The EU often ignores integration of refugees in order to appear tough, Vandvik said.

The reception directive was originally welcomed by ECRE, especially since there is now scope for the EU institutions to monitor reception conditions in the member states.

However, Vandvik said:



- There are a number of areas of concern, such as the wide use of discretion in a number of areas, the restriction of movement, access to education for children and access to the labour market. Vandvik mentioned a recent project

carried out by ECRE called Refugee Stories, where voices of refugees have been collected. ECRE has also launched six policy briefings on integration, which have been produced by the NGO Network of Integration Focal Points. Find out more on <http://www.ecre.org>

### INTEGRATING ASYLUM SEEKERS ON MALTA AND CYPRUS

During one of the workshops on Thursday, participants could listen to the experiences from two of the smallest countries in the EU – Malta and Cyprus.

- Integrating asylum seekers in Maltese society is not an easy task. Malta is not a destination country, most asylum seekers have the intention of going elsewhere. Stephen C. Vella said, presenting the Maltese Asylum Seekers Partnership. The project aimed to reach 30 asylum seekers but ended up certifying over a hundred asylum seekers in English language, Life Skills and employment preparation courses.



In relation to its population, Cyprus is the one country in the EU receiving most asylum seekers. During the period 2002-2007, around 30 000 claims for asylum were lodged.

- This situation presents a challenging situation for a small country, said Louiza Papaloizou. Through the EQUAL funded project Equality and Solidarity for Asylum Seekers, collaboration between the six main stakeholders was achieved for the first time in Cyprus.

### ASYLUM SEEKERS ASSISTING ASYLUM SEEKERS

An appreciated part of the conference was the presentation in plenary by Khaled Abdu, former asylum seeker and one of the founders of the AEASS, the Association of Eritrean Asylum Seekers in Sweden. AEASS, now called EDHR (Eritreans for Democracy and Human Rights), set out to assist Eritrean asylum seekers in making the most of the time waiting for a decision from the Swedish migration authorities. The organisation became vital in providing meaningful activities and creating a social platform for asylum seekers, as well as influencing the authorities.

- First impressions are lasting. That is why it is so important to receive asylum seekers in a good way, said Khaled Abdu.

However, AEASS has also ran into some difficulties along the way.

In Sweden, asylum seekers can not formally register as an organisation, we had to get the help from a Swedish national who were willing have the organisation registered in her name. Getting access to European funding is another difficult challenge.



- Organisations such as AEASS/EDHR are important for creating opportunities to get involved in society, Abdu said.

## LEARNING SEMINAR ON TRANSNATIONALITY

During one of the seminars on Wednesday, the EQUAL transnational partnership the Alliance described the process of planning for an international mainstreaming conference, to take place in the European Parliament in September 2007. Presentations were made by Frans Bastiaens from the Netherlands and Herman Schönmeier from Germany.



During the seminar, it became clear that this was not the only mainstreaming activity in the pipeline among

**Frans Bastiaens and Hermann Schönmeier.**

EQUAL projects working with asylum seekers. In addition to the initiative by the Alliance a number of mainstreaming activities open to large parts of the participants of the conference are to take place. Below a few examples:

**“Shaping migration strategies”.** European parliament, Brussels 19-20 Sep. 2007, visit <http://www.migration-conference-brussels.net> for more information

**Job fair for asylum seekers in Hamburg, end of Sept. 2007,** visit <http://www.fluchtort-hamburg.de> for more information

**14 June and 10 Oct. Events covering asylum seekers in Kiel and Neumünster.** For more information visit <http://www.frsb.de>

**8-10 November 2007 Paris,** Theater performances from Asylum seekers.

## ENTERTAINMENT



The Skåne-based a cappella sextet Vocal Six provided the entertainment at the opening dinner of the conference on Tuesday evening. Visit their web site at <http://www.vocalsix.com>

Contact: [veronique.laurens@cimade.org](mailto:veronique.laurens@cimade.org)

**28 June Emmen,** Netherlands. Symposium, Contact: [ave28june@drenthecollege.nl](mailto:ave28june@drenthecollege.nl)

For more transnational events check [www.temaasyl.se](http://www.temaasyl.se) (English section.)

### WHAT IS YOUR IMPRESSION OF THE CONFERENCE SO FAR, WHAT HAVE YOU FOUND MOST INTERESTING?



**Anzelika Bruze**  
**Latvian Parliament**  
I enjoyed the study visit to the International Health Communicators. It was also very interesting to listen to former asylum seeker Khaled Abdu during the plenary session.



**Antonio Follo**  
**The trade union CISL, Italy**  
For me, it was very interesting to listen to Peter Stub Jørgensen outlining the new European Social Fund and what opportunities there will be to work with asylum seekers in the future.



**Irene Windisch**  
**The Women's Organisation Danaida, Germany**  
The field trip to Denmark was an interesting experience that gave me new perspectives. I enjoyed listening to Khaled in the plenary, good to hear the perspective of the target group.



**David Hudson**  
**British Refugee Council, the EASI DP**  
I thought the facilitator did a very good job during the plenary session. The conference highlights the importance of a continuation of the work carried out by EQUAL.



**Amalia Digas**  
**The Swedish Migration Board**  
The conference is an opportunity to meet the whole spectra of actors working with asylum seekers. I thought Kent Andersson from the City of Malmö made an excellent presentation. It was also interesting to listen to Bjarte Vandvik from ECRE.

## A WORD FROM THE ORGANISERS

Setting up a conference like this is a big puzzle and we have been building the pieces together since last autumn. In spite of the long preparation time, due to different reasons the conference have been postponed twice, we have had problems with everything from translation to getting the right participation from key speakers. We have never lost faith that the conference had an important role

to play in mainstreaming results of EQUAL and as we are getting close to wrapping it up we are happy that we have contributed to that objective. A greeting of thanks to Hanna Högmark that played a key role in preparing the conference but did not have the opportunity to participate in the event.

